

WATER AND SANITATION:
FAIR POLICIES FOR ALL?

Gram Vikas (GV) are a rural development organisation working with poor and marginalised rural communities in Orissa since 1979. In water and sanitation, GV have identified an entry point activity, which addresses the issue of sanitation, and thereby water-borne diseases. Simultaneously, it makes 100% inclusion a pre-requisite, not only ensuring the entire community benefits, regardless of caste, class and gender, but also ensuring the effectiveness of the programme; as even if one member of the community continues to defecate in the open, and wash in common water sources, the health of everybody will be adversely affected. GV believe that for sanitation programmes to be truly effective, 100% inclusion is a necessity.

In addition to working in partnership with communities to enable every household in a village to have their own private toilet and bathing room, GV construct a water supply system, ensuring every household has a 24-hour supply of piped water to their home via three taps; one to the toilet, one to the bathing room and one to the kitchen. Wherever possible gravity flow water supply systems are used, overcoming the difficulty of having to pump water where there are no electricity connections, or having to pay expensive electricity bills for pumping water.

A large problem Gram Vikas and the communities regularly face is the disparity between rural and urban areas, especially in terms of government policy.

Orissa and Sanitation

Orissa is one of the poorest states in India, and has the dubious distinction of being the state with the poorest coverage of water and sanitation:

- ❑ Less than 20% of the population have access to a protected water supply
- ❑ Less than 5% to sanitation facilities
- ❑ Less than 1% to a piped water supply



Government Policies: Water and Sanitation

- The two key problems are:
- ❑ The amount of government support and funding available is considerably less in rural areas than in urban areas
 - ❑ Government policies are heavily biased towards the urban areas.

An example of this is the different water consumption quotas for rural and urban areas set by the government. Urban areas are considered to need 80 litres/capita/day, whereas rural areas are only considered to need 40 litres/capita/day. On top of their own personal and domestic needs, rural people need water for their livestock, which is so critical to their livelihoods, so why are they considered to need half the amount of water that urban people need?

In addition, in urban areas much of the infrastructure is supported by the government, which includes the provision of sanitation facilities and water supply systems. However, in rural areas the communities are expected to construct these themselves with no or minimum support.

Much of the problem is the engrained psyche that poor people only need poor solutions.

Government Sanitation Policies

GV have successfully persuaded the government to change their sanitation policies to make them more ‘pro rural poor’. For example, until recently, under the Total Sanitation Campaign, BPL families were only eligible for a Rs.500 subsidy (which was then enhanced to Rs.1200 and presently Rs. 2200) if the cost of their toilets was Rs.2000 or less. This policy further engrained into the psyche that poor people only deserve poor solutions, and in fact one of the big problems is that often toilets that are built in rural areas are sub-standard and most end up not being used. GV successfully lobbied for a change to this policy, so that now all BPL families receive a Rs.1200 subsidy, regardless of the cost of their toilets. However, this policy is still not satisfactory, as only BPL families receive a subsidy, which GV believes to be unfair on those rural families who live above the poverty line and are also unable to afford quality toilets. This is especially unfair when their urban counterparts have water and sanitation facilities supported by the government.

The above box shows, GV have been successful in lobbying for changes to some policies. However, this policy could still be improved further.

Currently, all BPL (Below Poverty Line) families are assisted with a subsidy of Rs.2200 for sanitation infrastructure, (regardless of the cost of their toilet) however, there continue to be a number of problems with this:

- ❑ For sanitation to be a health intervention, only assisting BPL families with Rs.2200 subsidy will not achieve any level of success, and will not stop faecal contamination of water-sources
- ❑ Many families who should be classed as BPL families are not registered as such, often due to a lack of knowledge as to how to become registered
- ❑ If APL (Above Poverty Line) families could afford a toilet without any incentives they would already have one.

The unfairness of these policies is further highlighted by the subsidy available for everyone for LPG. The rich consume more LPG than the poor, therefore get more subsidy. However, it is not possible for an APL family in a rural area to get a small incentive or assistance to construct a toilet.

The amount of money being spent on health care and the treatment of easily preventable diseases such as diarrhoea, by both the families and the Government is money that could easily be saved and be put to better use, by assisting all families to access good quality sanitation

Government Promoted Toilets V/s Gram Vikas Toilets

Characteristics of government promoted toilets:

- ❑ A concrete platform with a hole in the middle
- ❑ No or very limited superstructure, therefore no privacy or dignity when using them
- ❑ No water supply - In India, cleaning after defecation involves using water. Therefore a toilet with no water supply is effectively useless. If it is used, the burden of bringing water to the toilet falls on the women, who are already over burdened with ensuring there is enough water for the family's daily needs on top of many other domestic and wage-earning tasks.

Characteristics of Gram Vikas toilets:

- ❑ Complete superstructure, affording total privacy and dignity
- ❑ Piped water connection
- ❑ Ceramic pan
- ❑ Whole community involvement, including a financial contribution and supplying locally available materials and labour, therefore instilling a real sense of ownership of the facilities.

To encourage and motivate people to use toilets, they need to be made attractive and something to aspire to. There must be a real sense of dignity in using them. The Government’s money would be far better spent in supplying the external materials for proper toilets that would actually be used, and really make a difference to rural lives.



Electricity Pricing Regulations and Water Supply Policies

Currently, the electricity tariff for community-based water supply systems is charged at public institution rates, even though it is only for domestic use. If an individual villager established a bore well in their backyard and pumped water, they would be charged domestic rates. Why then, when the community comes together to do something really positive that benefits every household do they get penalised?

Reports suggest that more than 200 water supply projects in Orissa are not functioning due to high electricity charges, and the community not being able to pay the bills.

In urban areas, water supply to individual households is heavily subsidised by the government, whereas in rural areas the communities have to bear some of the cost of establishing water supply infrastructure as well as paying heavy electricity tariffs for domestic water consumption. Isn't it unjust?



There are many policies that are severely biased against the rural areas. However, with a few simple changes, these policies could make a major difference to the quality of life in rural areas.



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